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U-2 Designer Hints A New Mystery

The airplane designer whose blueprints put Francis Gary Powers' U-2 craft 12 miles above Russia thinks the plane may actually have been shot down intact.

"I think the crash photographs released by Russia are those of one of their own Beagle bombers," said Clarence L. Johnson, a Lockheed Aircraft Corp. engineer who began the U-2 project in 1954.

Others Speculate

"It would be very interesting to know why they have hidden the U-2," he said.

Johnson's speculation was echoed elsewhere, especially in Paris, where the newspaper "Aurore" offered the following explanation:

"The American plane landed voluntarily. The Russians studied it, took all the proofs and documents they needed out

of it, and then destroyed it."

The possibility that pilot Powers delivered the plane to the Russians was also raised in Washington, where at least one diplomat asked how it could be possible for a man to be shot down from a height of 65,000 feet with all his gear intact.

Dukes Backs Pilot

But Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, immediately expressed full confidence in Powers, giving an impressive account of the pilot's four-year service record.

As for Johnson, whose specific task on the U-2 project

was to design a single-engine jet reconnaissance plane that could fly beyond the reach of either jet fighters or rocket interceptors, he announced his speculation on the basis of the Russian press pictures.

Since Soviet Premier Khrushchev announced destruction of the plane, the Russians have been releasing photographs not only of the survival kit, the money, the gun and the jewelry the pilot carried but also photographs taken by the U-2 camera on its espionage flight.

But it was on the photographs of the actual plane wreck that Johnson based his analysis.